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Yellow-throated Oriole, *Icterus xantholaemus* Gil 1918, a non-valid species

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Received 25 February 1999

While updating the bird collection of the Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales (MNCN) in Madrid, Spain, the type specimen of the Yellow-throated Oriole *Icterus xantholaemus* was examined. This species, described by Gil Lletget (1918), was only known from this specimen (Peters 1968, Sibley & Monroe 1990) and special care was taken to check the capture data and to compare the specimen with allied species, since its status remained doubtful.

Peters (1968) and Howard & Moore (1991) accepted the Yellow-throated Oriole but Peters doubted its validity because only the type specimen had been found. Similarly, Sibley & Monroe (1990) did not check the specimen but speculated that it "may be an immature of *I. mesomelas* or possibly a hybrid of unknown parentage".

The type specimen (MNCN 8002) clearly shows the distinctive features of the male of Saffron-cowled Blackbird *Xanthopsar flavus*: head, lesser wing-coverts, rump band, flanks and underparts golden yellow; tibial feathers, lores, nape and rest of upperparts black (see Ridgely & Tudor 1989). The measurements taken (bill 21, wing 104, tail 79, tarsus 25.5 mm) also fall within those reported from eight males of *X. flavus* kept at the Museo Nacional de Historia Natural de Montevideo (bill 20.1–26, $x=22$, wing 102.5–112.3, $x=106.7$, tail 71.9–83.6, $x=78.9$, tarsus 24.6–26.7, $x=25.6$ mm) (Cuello *in litt.* 1998).

Astonishingly, the specimen from which Gil Lletget described the Yellow-throated Oriole was collected in Ecuador, more than 3,000 km northwest of the known range of the Saffron-cowled Blackbird (south Paraguay, south Brazil, Uruguay and the northeast of Argentina). However the specimen has two old labels. On one of them appears in print: "América. Ecuador: Colección de Manuel Villavicencio. No." with the number "3" written in ink. From this information, Gil Lletget (1918) noted Ecuador as terra typica and Manuel Villavicencio as collector. The other label is hand written: "Sur de Brasil". This latter is exactly like those used by the naturalist Manuel Jiménez de la Espada, a member of the *Expedición al Pacífico 1862–1865* (Puig-Samper 1988) who reports the purchase in Quito of a bird collection from Mr Villavicencio (*Catálogo de la aves recogidas por Don Marcos Jiménez de la Espada de Noviembre 1864 a Octubre 1865*. Unpublished hand written catalogue. Archives of the MNCN of Madrid). Villavicencio's collection was accompanied by a numbered list, which is missing. Jiménez de la Espada might have written *Sur de Brasil* as the

locality of capture, based on this list, which would fit with the known range of the Saffron-cowled Blackbird.

In the light of this information, it appears that the bird was probably misidentified by Gil Lletget and the validity of *Icterus xantholaemus* Gil 1918 should therefore be rejected, when it becomes a synonym of *Xanthopsar flavus* (Gmelin 1788).

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Juan P. Cuello, curator of the bird collection at the Museo Nacional of Montevideo for providing us with the measurements of *Xanthopsar flavus*. Alan Tye greatly improved the English version of this manuscript and Alvaro Jaramillo pointed out some errors on the *X. flavus* description. This work was in part supported by a Comunidad Autónoma of Madrid Fellowship (08/231/96) to the second author.

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Shape of avian eggs: a response to Barta and Székely

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Received 3 December 1999

Barta & Székely (1997) examined the shapes of avian eggs and made predictions on the expected shape for clutches of varying size, based on mathematical calculations relating to efficient incubation. They predict that:

1. The optimum shape for a one-egg clutch is spherical.
2. For a two or three egg clutch it is biconical.
3. For four eggs, the shape should be conical (pointed).
4. In clutches of over five/seven eggs it should again be spherical (the text says five, but the summary says seven).